

THE LAST UNDERCOVER

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Veteran Undercover FBI Agent

THE LAST UNDERCOVER

True Story:

FBI Agent's

Dangerous Dance with Evil



San Diego, CA, 2016

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vii
-----------------------	-----

PREFACE.....	ix
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1. A WALK TOWARD THE BEAST	1
2. LIVING IN THE SHADOW WORLD	8
3. CHINA WHITE.....	20
4. THE WELCOMING COMMITTEE.....	30
5. GLOBE-HOPPING SMUGGLER.....	38
6. A NAMBLA SAFETY LECTURE	45
7. THE COURTROOM CRAPSHOOT	55
8. MEET THE PREDATORS	62
9. WORKING THE HOOD.....	69
10. PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE	76
11. IMPROVISE TO SURVIVE	85
12. A NAMBLA HISTORY LESSON	91
13. THE MURDER OF JEFFREY CURLEY	101
14. SEXUAL ADDICTION	110
15. THE FIX IS IN.....	119
16. KEEPING MY SHIRT ON	127
17. HALF-FULL OR HALF-EMPTY?	135
18. THE MOST BIZARRE	142
19. RUB-A-DUB-DUB.....	150
20. ENOUGH TO GO ON?.....	158
21. NAMBLA PEN-PALS	167
22. THE MIAMI NAMBLA CONFERENCE	174
23. RELAXING WITH PREDATORS.....	180

24. LEADERLESS, SHIRTLESS, CLUELESS.....	186
25. CRIMINAL ADMISSIONS	195
26. “JUST BECAUSE YOU’RE PARANOID DOESN’T MEAN I’M NOT OUT TO GET YOU”	202
27. SIX-PACK ABS AND A KEY OF COKE	208
28. PREDATORS OUT ON THE TOWN.....	215
29. LEGOLAND MAKES IT UNANIMOUS	222
30. AGE OF CONSENT: ZERO.....	231
31. TROLLING FOR A THREE-TIME OFFENDER	240
32. BAITING THE HOOK	248
33. GETTING THE GOODS.....	257
34. HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?	266
35. SWARMING TO THE BAIT	275
36. GREG NUSCA, aka DAVID R. BUSBY.....	283
37. DIARY OF A SEXUAL PREDATOR	290
38. MY LIFE AS A GHOSTWRITER.....	297
39. LOSING IT?	304
40. KEEP THOSE PLATES SPINNING... ..	312
41. INTENSIVE CARE.....	321
42. FINAL PREPARATIONS	329
43. PREDATORS TELL ALL	336
44. SPRINGING THE TRAP.....	344
45. AFTER THE ARRESTS	350
46. THE TRIAL OF SAM LINDBLAD	357
47. THE VERDICT	364

NAMBLA CORRESPONDENCE	371
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR	375
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PREFACE

The simple words of A.W. Tozer in *The Divine Conquest* spoke volumes as to my motivation in writing *The Last Undercover*. He wrote, “The only book that should ever be written is one that flows up from the heart, forced out by the inward pressure...His book will be to him not only imperative, it will be inevitable....”

After 26 years as an FBI agent, all of them as a street agent and many of those years spent in various undercover roles, I have experienced more than most. I have held a baby’s arm...not a baby by the arm, just the arm, from the elbow to the fingers, an arm that had been severed in a tragic accident. I have seen a man’s head detached from its torso, and I’ve attended autopsies. I have comforted a woman with the brains of her boyfriend splattered on her blouse, and have confronted armed suspects. I’ve fired my weapon in the heat of a drug deal “gone bad” and have been threatened with death by disgruntled felons who had been taken into custody. In my various undercover roles, I have gone toe-to-toe with some of the most dangerous, notorious, and sometimes fascinating criminals in our society. Five years of working street gangs and more than twenty years working various organized crime groups have exposed me to the best and worst of mankind.

Throughout all this, two things allowed me to withstand the-day-to-day battles I fought. First was an unwavering belief that God, for whatever reason and however undeserved, had wrapped His protective arms around me. Second was a family that was there for me each and every evening when I returned home from work.

But with all the stories, all the incidents, all the assignments, only one flowed “up from the heart, forced out by inward pressure.” That was my experience infiltrating NAMBLA. I needed to tell that story. I needed to

share that experience to alert the world to an underground network of pedophiles targeting boys.

I first met my agent, Bucky Rosenbaum, at my brother Dan's Christmas party. Bucky had been on the staff at Saddleback Church in Orange County, California and had represented Rick Warren in *The Purpose Driven Life* series. Bucky had decided to launch his own literary agency and was looking for clients. He may now regret attending that party because I began to talk to him about my undercover experiences in NAMBLA and my desire to expose the organization. We agreed to meet later in the year, once he got the agency off the ground and I began writing about the investigation. I wasn't interested in pounding my chest and bragging about my undercover exploits or in writing a tell-all exposé about the FBI. With a missionary zeal, I wanted to alert the world to the "boy lover" agenda. That was the book flowing up from within.

By the time we next met, I had almost 85,000 words on paper, detailing the three-year investigation. Bucky, too, captured my vision and agreed to help me find a publisher. We both thought the process would be easy. Child molestation was a topic that cut across the political aisle. *Law & Order: SVU* was a top rated show on NBC and Chris Hansen's *Dateline NBC: To Catch a Predator* segments were drawing 10 million viewers with each episode. We assumed the publishers would be craving an exposé on such a hideous organization written from the perspective of an undercover FBI agent. Two dozen rejection letters later we realized it was not going to be an easy sell. Many of the rejections were thoughtful, praising my writing and my willingness to target a notorious group of pedophiles. No one, however, wanted to take on the project. Several rejections even used "ick factor" which must be a literary term taught at our prestigious universities. But several publishers were helpful in encouraging me to expand the subject matter by including more undercover stories.

As I thought about what several of the publishers said, I knew had I never had the undercover experience of twenty plus administratively

approved undercover operations, I would have never been successful in pulling off the NAMBLA assignment. Their suggestions to expand the manuscript made sense. Although I balked early in the process of including more stories, I knew that if I wanted to accomplish my mission of exposing the boy lover movement, I needed to add these other undercover investigations. I set about expanding the manuscript.

Bucky then called upon a friend in the publishing world, Gary Terashita at Center Street. The manuscript had been originally rejected by them, but Gary agreed to give it another read. After a second look, he caught our vision, bringing on board Thom Lemmons to help me work through the now 125,000 words and give shape to my story. A special thanks to Gary, Thom, and Harry Helm for believing in me and taking a chance with my message.

As I recount my other undercover stories, I relied on memory and what few mementos I had from the investigations, mainly news accounts, court documents, and administrative write-ups either for awards or chastisements. For the NAMBLA account, I relied not only on my memory but trial preparation materials, including reports, transcripts, and tape and video recordings.

As a condition of my employment with the FBI, it is necessary for me to obtain the Bureau's approval for any published material. This book has been vetted and approved under the provisions of the Prepublication Review Policy. Upon the FBI's review of the manuscript, there were only two requirements. First, I had to delete the names of any FBI agent mentioned in my original submission. Second, I had to clearly state the views expressed in the book do not necessarily represent the views of the FBI. Although I hate not giving proper credit to those other special agents who worked with me throughout my career, I complied with the FBI's conditions. I hope those agents will forgive me since for one of the few times in my career, I complied with an FBI mandate.

What follows is the true account of my career as an undercover special agent with the FBI, culminating in my infiltration of NAMBLA. Thanks for joining me in the journey of *The Last Undercover*.

1 A WALK TOWARD THE BEAST

New York NAMBLA Conference

As my cab honked its way along the New York City streets, I stared out the window at the crowds on the sidewalks and tried to talk down the apprehension rising inside me. Don't get me wrong: I have known fear, and I have felt the temple-pounding rush of adrenaline pumping through my body. But this evening, a sense of anxiety enveloped me—a dull dread hung on me like a soggy sweater. The sensation was unlike anything in my more than two decades of undercover work for the FBI. Tonight was different—different from anything I had ever experienced. This case was going to be the toughest I had ever tackled, for reasons I didn't fully understand... yet.

It was a clear Friday evening: Veterans Day weekend. I was in New York to infiltrate an organization known as NAMBLA: the North American Man/Boy Love Association: a society of men who professed sexual attraction to young boys. The plan looked simple enough in the operations order but seemingly impossible to orchestrate; I would pose as an aging pedophile, work myself into a position of trust within the organization, and gain criminal admissions from its members—admissions that would lead to successful federal prosecutions.

But as the time neared for me to make my debut with NAMBLA, things were looking anything but simple. I was unable to view the group I'd be infiltrating with anything other than revulsion. How could I pretend to actually be one of them—without becoming physically ill or physically violent? I wasn't sure I knew the answer.

During my career with the FBI, I successfully targeted some of the most treacherous criminal groups in America: La Cosa Nostra; the Russian, Sicilian, and Mexican Mafias; Asian organized crime groups; black street gangs. In the early eighties I was the undercover agent in the Los Angeles Mafia family case that resulted in the imprisonment of LA's top fifteen mobsters. I had worked street gangs. Picture a white man in South Central LA, buying rock cocaine from convicted felons and known killers. While undercover, I had shot two drug dealers who attempted to turn our \$400,000 cocaine transaction into a "rip." As the undercover agent in more than twenty administratively approved operations, lasting anywhere from several days to more than three years, I have successfully posed as a drug dealer, contract killer, residential burglar, degenerate gambler, international weapons dealer, and white-collar criminal.

But tonight I was about to spend the weekend playing the role of a "boy lover," or "BL," as NAMBLA members refer to themselves. It was quite a journey that had brought me here, and tonight marked the next step in the FBI's efforts to target men who preyed on boys. NAMBLA was real—much more than an episodic joke on *South Park*. The group was celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary and I was going to be present for that celebration. After all, I was a dues-paying member.

San Diego, 1980

My tour of humanity's dark side began in earnest back in 1980, just after I left the Marine Corps. I had spent four years as a judge advocate, serving as prosecutor, defense counsel, and an appellate review attorney. Regardless of how glamorous they make the JAG corps look on TV, the military courtroom lacked the excitement I had hoped it would bring. I worked on trials running the gamut from unauthorized absence to murder, but the cases were never "who dunnits." The decision always came down to whether the confession was admissible or the search was

legal. For me, the excitement waned quickly. The 150 trials in which I participated did, however, prepare me for my work in the FBI. Better than most, I knew what was necessary to get a conviction. Often those requirements had nothing to do with Bureau-imposed administrative hurdles. Following bureaucratic regulations that had no evidentiary value was never my strong suit and no administrator ever accused me of being procedurally pure.

After suffering through three years of law school and four years as an attorney in the Marine Corps, I knew the courtroom was not where I wanted to be. Neither did I aspire to spend the rest of my life tethered to a desk: drafting wills, divorce decrees, or other legal documents. The FBI, known for its recruitment of lawyers and accountants, proved to be a near-perfect fit. I would be getting paid to play cops and robbers, something I did for free as a kid. Never in my twenty-six-year career did I ever question my decision to join the Bureau. Sure, I had bad days, but knowing the next call might put me on the thrill ride of a lifetime made the momentary frustrations easier to handle... usually.

Hollywood envisions every FBI agent assuming an undercover identity and capturing crooks with some sophisticated ruse. In fact, very few FBI agents ever remove the suit coat and loosen the tie. Today, the FBI carefully screens every agent seeking to work in an undercover capacity. Few are selected, and fewer still successfully negotiate the difficult path to undercover certification. From that small number, only a handful continue to accept undercover roles throughout their careers. For those who do, it can mean the most exhilarating challenge anybody could ever hope for.

But in 1980, receiving an undercover assignment was as easy as raising a hand. I was looking for excitement, variety, and above all, a way to avoid being tied to a desk. Undercover work seemed the perfect means to all my ends. I wanted to enter the world of *Serpico*; I wanted the thrill of the chase and the satisfaction of the hard-earned

collar at the end. I was fortunate enough to have a supervisor who encouraged me to pursue my dreams. And so it was, in 1980, after about six months in the Bureau, I found myself on my way to meet Dave, my first undercover target.

As the time for the meeting neared, my heart was pounding and my knees were shaking—less in fear than from excitement. Still, I knew I needed to get my emotions under control; Dave was an accomplished criminal, and if he spotted the knees, my undercover career would be short-lived.

The San Diego office had identified Dave as a subject through wiretap surveillance and an informant's tip. We were investigating an art theft ring and Dave was a major player with connections to the Bonanno crime family in Arizona. As is often the case in undercover work, Dave would end up taking us in directions we never anticipated.

My cover was pretty weak and not at all well thought out: I would be Bob Bourne. I kept my real first name, but took the last name of the character from Robert Ludlum's famous novel. My persona was that of a *nouveau riche* high roller. I would let Dave know I had made a bundle in real estate and was looking to invest in Western art, which we knew from surveillance to be his specialty. Dave would have bargains to offer simply because his inventory was hotter than the proverbial two-dollar pistol.

Dave was lean and athletic; he trained as a long distance runner. His training served him well, since one of his favorite M.O.s involved escaping on foot from snatch-and-grab jewelry heists. He would research the shooting policies of local police departments to determine whether they were authorized to shoot a fleeing felon. After selecting his target area, he would fly into town, wearing a three-piece suit and carrying a ring with an empty setting. He would locate a jewelry store near the airport and wave the ring at the unsuspecting sales staff, asking to see stones that fit the setting. As soon as the clerk set a case of stones in front

of him, Dave would grab the case and run, knowing police weren't likely to shoot. By the time a patrol unit arrived on the scene, he was back at the airport waiting for his return flight, now holding a pocketful of diamonds.

We set up an office front in San Diego's Sorrento Valley, a commercial/industrial area north of the city. It was the perfect ruse. The tech agents divided the oversized office into two separate units; a sliding bookshelf straight out of a Hollywood movie scene concealed the hidden room where my backup agents operated the audio and video recording equipment that monitored every meeting. Comfortable deep rich leather furniture, a fully stocked wet bar, and walls adorned with Western art prints provided a relaxed atmosphere in which to conduct business. Dave and his confederates never displayed much curiosity about what I did at the office, but several of my fellow tenants complained to the building manager something suspicious was occurring on the second floor. I'm not sure if they were alarmed because I really sold myself as a criminal, or if I was just sloppy. In any event, I successfully lured Dave and his associates to the office, and as I waited for him to arrive for our first meeting—my first face-to-face experience undercover—I took deep breaths, said a couple of prayers, and tried to control the riptide of emotions surging through me.

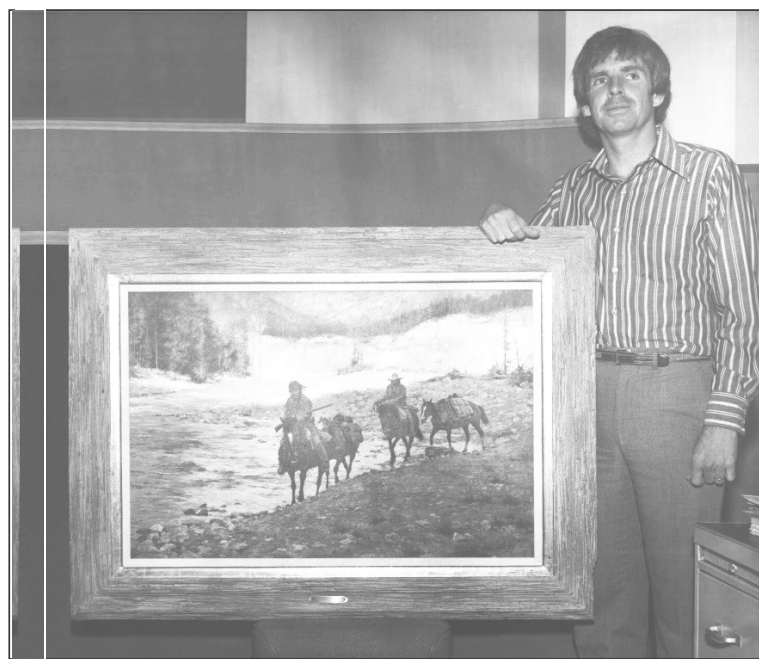
As it turned out, the meeting was short and rather uneventful. Dave never noticed my knees and we actually hit it off. Our conversation was rather innocuous, but the important thing is Dave left believing I had money and was willing to buy at a five-finger discount. I came away with a stress headache and a lingering adrenaline jag. What a thrill to have successfully completed my first undercover meet! The target believed me—and I believed myself. I was a junky for the jazzed-up feeling, and I continued to chase that buzz throughout my career. I was invincible, or at least so I thought, and during that abbreviated meeting, I realized I had found my niche in the law enforcement world.

In reality, Dave and I had a lot in common: he neither drank nor smoked; he exercised regularly and was in great shape. I was an experienced runner who had competed in over a half-dozen marathons, completing several in less than three hours. Dave wasn't much of a talker, so running dominated much of the discussion during the several months I spent targeting him and his associates.

Starting out as a young agent was a blessing rather than a curse. I had yet to pick up the cop lingo. Cops said, "Have a good one." Bad guys said, "Later." I also didn't have the J. Edgar Hoover, everything-is-either-black-or-white mindset. As I learned throughout my career, the skills needed to successfully work undercover were self-taught, consisting mostly of common sense seasoned with lessons from the street. No school could adequately prepare you for the job—at least, no school sponsored by the FBI. In fact, I tried to avoid such schools and seminars. Too often, I found the rules promulgated by the various departments and agencies boxed you into a specific type of character

that could easily be detected by the bad guys. My unorthodoxy proved valuable throughout my career, as I negotiated with criminals from every culture and economic stratum. My best teachers were the informants I interacted with and the bad guys I arrested.

Shortly after meeting Dave, the investigation hit pay dirt: he had a painting he had recently "acquired" and was looking to quietly dispose of it at a price well below its true market value.



I got a great deal on this "hot" painting that Dave acquired from a Scottsdale, Arizona, art gallery.

Just like something out of a TV crime drama, Dave showed up at the office with the painting, valued at more than \$50,000, and we negotiated a “fair” price, all on surveillance video. It was as simple as that. The Bureau put up the funds and with sufficient “green,” I became Dave’s new best friend.